Science Fiction Series

No. 6

WHEN THE MOON FELL

BY

MORRISON COLLADAY

Published By

STELLAR PUBLISHING CORPORATION

96-98 PARK PLACE

NEW YORK

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Title: When the Moon fell

Author: Morrison Colladay

Release date: April 18, 2025 [eBook #75905]

Language: English

Original publication: New York: Stellar Publishing Corporation, 1929

Credits: Roger Frank

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WHEN THE MOON FELL ***

A great blinding segment of a sphere appeared in the sky. I realized that it was the moon travelling toward the Earth at a terrific velocity.

WHEN THE MOON FELL

By Morrison M. Colladay

CHAPTER I—A Changed World

Now that we who survived have reconstructed a civilization on a rational basis, we want to preserve for future generations as many accounts as possible by the actual witnesses of the catastrophe that overtook the world.

In 1929 certain curious aberrations in the motion of the moon were noticed by astronomers, and attempts to explain them were made by suggesting that the solar system had been invaded by an unknown visitor which had not yet been discovered. It is still believed that this is the most likely explanation of what occurred. When this invader approached the earth, it probably passed between it and the moon. Its velocity must have been so great that it continued on its course in spite of the attraction of the earth. However, it disturbed the balance of forces sufficiently to draw the moon from its orbit and start its headlong progress toward us.

I was away in Labrador when all this occurred, and it is due to that fact that I am alive today. The things that happened in the densely inhabited portions of the globe will be recounted by survivors who were eye witnesses. It is sufficient to say that when the news of the impending catastrophe became known a universal apathy seemed to settle over humanity. It was apparently overwhelmed by the hopelessness of any effort to escape. The religious people of the period regarded the coming event as fulfillment of a prophecy of the destruction of the world in the Last Day. People who had never before been religious became so in an hour.

First Intimations

It is well that I begin on my personal experiences:

As I said before I was in Labrador when the moon first showed an aberration in its motion. It will be remembered that in April, 1928, three aviators, two Germans and one

Irish, started on a flight across the ocean from Ballycombe, Ireland, to New York. They succeeded in crossing the ocean from east to west, a feat which had not been accomplished before, but owing to fog and storms they lost their way, and landed on a little island off the coast of Labrador.

The locality was absolutely inaccessible except by air. The aviators had damaged their plane in landing, and it was necessary to get to them with spare parts. The Associated Press, as well as some of the larger dailies, thought it was equally important that their stories should reach the world. There was a wireless station on the mainland fifteen miles away, but for some reason the operator did not get the sort of news the papers wanted. The Canadian Government started a steamer toward the island, but it was soon caught fast in the ice.

I had been a flyer during the war and continued to fly a plane for the pleasure it gave me. In that world which now seems so distant, I had some reputation as a writer. The Associated Press suggested that I fly to Greenly Island and get the stories of the marooned aviators. Perhaps I am spending more time on this episode than it deserves. It is sufficient to say that I got the stories and got them back to New York.

If that had been all there was to the adventure, there is a strong probability that I would have perished some months later with most of the other inhabitants of the United States. It happened, however, that there were other flyers planning east-to-west hops. It occurred to the powers who decided such things, that it might be a good idea to have me fly back to Labrador and make it my headquarters and establish an observation post while transatlantic flights were being attempted.

Accordingly, I flew back to Labrador whenever a transatlantic flight was rumored, and made my headquarters at Point Amour on the mainland. The wireless station was here, and about a hundred people. Little Greenly Island was some fifteen miles across Belle Isle Strait. I was getting rather

bored waiting for something to happen, when one night Jim Daley, the wireless operator, came running to the cottage where I stayed, too excited to wait until nine o'clock, when I always strolled over to the wireless station for a game of chess.

I stared at him in astonishment. "What's all the excitement about?" I inquired.

He had been running so fast that for a moment he could not get his breath to talk.

"You wait until you hear," he gasped. "I bet you'll be as excited as I am. The world's coming to an end next week!"

I laughed.

"No, I mean it," he said. "It's not a joke. Here's a bulletin issued by the Smithsonian. I copied it as it came in." He handed me a sheet of paper.

The News Comes Out

As far as I know, this bulletin was the first intimation of the coming catastrophe sent out over the radio. I assume that every effort was made to keep the matter quiet, until it became evident that no escape was possible.

Consequently up there in Labrador we had heard none of the rumors that had spread over the civilized world, and had seen no references to the strange lunar phenomenon which in a sense had prepared most people for the announcement of some unusual event.

At this time there had been no change in the moon's course or size visible to the naked eye. In the parts of the world where newspapers were printed and read, there had been the usual few lines on a back page that were given to any astronomical phenomenon, such as the birth of a Nova or the discovery of a telescopic comet.

Some days before, astronomers in Colorado and South Africa had simultaneously announced the aberration in the moon's motion. There were occasional facetious references to the moon's skittishness—emanating from the pens of bored

columnists. The next day there was nothing new from the astronomers, but the third day there was an announcement that caused faint stirrings of anxiety among those who read between the lines.

It was on the fourth day that announcements were made in England and America on the joint authority of the Smithsonian Institution and the British Royal Society, that some unknown force had displaced the moon from its orbit, and that it was feared, though calculations were not yet complete, that it would collide with or at least brush the earth, resulting in a disaster of the first magnitude.

The formal announcement of the two scientific societies was broadcast that night, and I was reading the part of it that Jim had written down.

I still have that piece of paper. Even as I look at it to copy it here, I get again that thrill of horror, that for a moment paralyzed me that night.

> OFFICIAL BULLETIN: Issued by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D. C., and the British Royal Society. Broadcast by all means possible. Recent aberrations of motion of the moon have been caused by its being thrown from its orbit by some unknown force. Incomplete calculations indicate that it will collide with the earth somewhere in the central Pacific region, on Thursday between eleven and twelve at night. It is believed that the disaster will be complete and there is no possible way of escape. Further bulletins will be issued every few hours and will be broadcast immediately. There is always the possibility that some force similar to the one which threw the moon from its orbit may again change its course. It is urged that all persons meet the crisis as calmly as possible.

“Well?” asked Jim eagerly, when I had finished reading it.

“If it’s not a hoax, I guess it means we’re done for,” I said slowly. “Suppose we go over to the station and see what more comes in.”

When we left the house I looked up at the moon, hanging full in the sky, and Jim’s apprehensive glance followed mine. I imagined it was distinctly larger than usual and that it shone with a sinister orange-colored glow instead of its usual silvery light. It was probably not imagination, for people all over the world reported the same thing that night.

We entered the wireless house and Jim sat down with the receivers clamped to his ears. He began to take down a message which was coming in and when he had finished, handed it to me.

> BULLETIN: Tidal wave in the Pacific overwhelmed many low-lying islands with great loss of life. All communications with Hawaii cut off. Smithsonian announces that tidal waves following course of moon will within the next twenty-four hours sweep far inland.

Jim was taking down another message. I read it over his shoulder.

> BULLETIN: There is possibility that life near the poles may survive. It will probably be possible to use airplanes for the next twenty-four hours; after that, constantly increasing gales reaching hitherto unheard of force, will make travel of any kind impossible. Any survivors of the catastrophe should endeavor to preserve a record of the phenomena that occur immediately before the impact of the moon and immediately thereafter.

CHAPTER II—A Start for Safety

Everyone knows now how that group of scientists scattered over the world, knowing there was no escape for them, calmly continued their observations and calculations and announced them over the radio. They were undoubtedly the real heroes of the catastrophe. Our new world honors their memory as scientists were never honored in those days.

Jim watched me as I read the last bulletin. When I had finished he asked, “Well, what do we do? Stay here and take what’s coming, or make a try for the north?”

I thought for a few minutes. “In the first place, I don’t believe it is worth while alarming the natives,” I said. “They can’t do anything for themselves, and we can’t do anything for them. As for us, I think we’d better load as much gasoline and food in the plane as she can carry, and make for the interior.”

“Not go farther north? We might be safer on the ice than on land.”

“How long do you suppose the ice will last? Even if we survive the collision, the heat generated will melt all ice, even up here.”

Jim looked at me a little helplessly. “Don’t forget that Labrador has water on three sides. If we go into the interior, I don’t believe we’ll escape the tidal waves they’re predicting.”

“Probably not,” I rejoined cheerfully, “but the chances are a thousand to one we’ll be snuffed out one way or another before the collision occurs, so what difference does it make?”

There was another message coming in and Jim turned to take it.

“Don’t waste time doing that,” I said. “Hear that wind rising now? Let’s load up and start.”

Doing that was quite simple. The hangar contained all the fuel we could carry. When we rolled the machine out I

looked over the little village, rather conscience-stricken for a moment at leaving them in ignorance of what was coming. They couldn't reach the interior in time, I reflected, even if we did tell them, and they might as well remain happy as long as they could.

"Where are we headed for?" asked Jim.

I pointed to the Laurentian Mountains which extend along the Labrador coast. "Anywhere the other side of those."

Jim whirled the propeller and kicked the blocks from in front of the wheels. Then he climbed on board. We should have had skids on the undercarriage instead of wheels, to land on the snow, but we would have to do the best we could with what we had. The roar of the motor brought some of the inhabitants out-of-doors, and they watched us, wonderingly, as we took off into the night with that sinister orange moon gazing down at us.

The mountains are not high and we crossed them without difficulty. Presently the sky became gray in the east, and the moon, still in the sky, looked menacing. By the time the sun rose over the horizon we were almost cheerful.

I had been looking for a place to land, and decided to take a chance on the broad plateau at the top of the northern end of the mountain chain. Here the rocks were not old Laurentian but sandstone. The place we came down on was as flat as a table top and had been blown clear of snow by the wind, which had become high enough to make landing difficult. There was no shelter on the plateau, and we had to hang on to the wings of the plane to steady it.

Finally we reached a little rocky valley. It was really only a depression in the surface of the mountain, but it was deep enough to shelter the plane and us from the increasing fury of the wind. We anchored the plane as well as we could, and then made a breakfast on canned beans.

"What next?" asked Jim when we had finished. "Maybe you'd better try to get some sleep while I watch."

I shook my head. "We'll both try to sleep now. There's

nothing to watch for, and tonight we'll probably both want to be awake."

We crawled into our sleeping bags and the last thing I remember was the thought that the increasingly shrill screeching of the wind was an improvement on the noise made by the sirens of the New York Fire Department.

I do not know what wakened me. I instinctively looked at my watch and saw it was three o'clock. At first I was not sure whether I was awake or whether I was in the middle of one of the half-waking nightmares we sometimes have. Lying in the depression in the mountain, I could see neither horizon but only the sky overhead. I rubbed my eyes and looked again.

Nearer and Nearer

Instead of the usual blue, the sky was a burnished copper.

The wind was blowing a hurricane with a steady intensity from east to west. All aviators are able to judge wind velocities pretty accurately, but this was something entirely beyond my experience. I had felt a hundred-and-fifty mile an hour gale during the Miami hurricane, but this was vastly greater.

I could see flickering shadows overhead and it took me some time to realize that they were solid objects carried by the wind. In addition to the shrieking wind like an enormous siren, there was now a steady roar like thunder in the mountains. I crawled out of my sleeping bag and shivered to the intense cold. When we went to sleep the thermometer, I judge, was about twenty above. Now I knew it must be away below zero.

Jim was still sleeping when I bent over and shook his shoulder. He slowly opened his eyes. I put my mouth close to his ear to make him hear in the uproar of the wind.

"Better get up," I said. "Something's happening."

He glanced at the copper sky and scrambled out of his sleeping bag. "Brrrr, it's cold!" he said, shivering. "What does

it all mean?"

"I imagine it means the moon is rising over the horizon and is pretty close to us."

"How are we going to keep from freezing?"

"Get into the cabin, I guess. If the wind doesn't reach the plane we'll be just as safe as we are here, and if it does it will tear us to pieces wherever we are."

We had worked the plane into the deepest part of the depression between the sandstone ridges and it looked safe enough, unless the mountain itself should be demolished. We gathered up our sleeping bags and scrambled through the little door.

It was soon after we got inside that the moon appeared overhead. Jim and I have never been able to agree as to how big it actually looked that second night. I suppose we thought it was bigger than it really was, because it had increased so much in size since the previous night. It came over the sandstone ridge, a great scarlet globe mottled with black.

"Gad, it's right on top of us!" exclaimed Jim.

"No it isn't," I replied, "but it probably will be tomorrow."

"Do you suppose we'll be alive then?" asked Jim, gazing in awe at the great sphere, with its mountains and valleys, now floating almost above our heads.

"It doesn't look like it now," I replied, "but still you never can tell."

It was that night that the headlong plunge toward the earth was arrested, and the next day saw the scarlet sphere no larger when it appeared. We immediately became hopeful that we might escape. We had grown used to the sound of the wind and we had slept under the plane. We had the cabin so full of gasoline cans and food that there was no room for us to stretch out.

The sky had retained its burnished copper hue, but after the moon had passed over the western ridge, the wind and changed sky were the only things to remind us of what was

happening. Then, as I said, when we found the next morning that the moon was no larger, we were distinctly encouraged.

It took only fifteen hours to encircle the earth, that time.

“I believe I can calculate how near us it is,” I said.

I figured for a few minutes on a scrap of paper and decided that the moon and the earth were at that moment ninety thousand miles apart. It seems that I was ten thousand miles out of the way, but as my result was based on a purely mathematical calculation, without any help from observation other than the moon’s time of revolution around the earth, my error was excusable.

Waiting for the End

There was no slackening of the wind after the moon had disappeared beneath the western cliff which was our horizon.

It was then eleven o’clock in the morning. The sky kept its burnished copper tint and the sun was not visible. In fact, we did not see the sun during this entire period. Day was a little brighter than night, but there was nothing that corresponded to ordinary daylight.

“Now if the moon doesn’t come up for fifteen hours,” I said to Jim, “we’ll know that the worst is not going to happen.”

“Why?”

“It will mean that the force that flung it in the direction of the earth has been neutralized in some way, and that it will continue to revolve around the earth about 90,000 miles away instead of 240,000.”

Jim looked cheerful for the first time in two days.

“We’ll know by two o’clock tomorrow morning, then?”

“If the news is bad, we’ll know it before that.”

There was no possibility of our venturing out of the depression between the two sandstone cliffs where we were sheltered from the wind. There was nothing to do except wait. As the half light, that we called day, faded, Jim and I began to watch the eastern cliff. Six o’clock, seven o’clock,

eight o'clock passed.

Jim turned to me with a half grin. "Seems funny to be watching for the moon and frightened to death for fear we'll see it." "Well, I guess we're safe if we don't see it for the next six hours."

I climbed into the cabin of the plane and began going over the engine. Suddenly I heard a shout from Jim. I jumped out of the door to the ground and saw him pointing to the eastern cliff.

There was a line of molten gold above it, too dazzling to look at.

It was at that moment that we had our first earthquake. There had been many earlier ones in other parts of the world. I was thrown violently to the ground and the sideways motion was so strong that I tried to find something on the bare rocky surface to hang on to. By the time I was able to raise myself to a sitting posture, a great blinding segment of a sphere had appeared in the sky.

Of course I realized immediately that it was the moon, which must now be approaching the earth at a terrific velocity. Why the reflected light from it was so dazzling I have never been able to determine. As far as I know, in other parts of the world persons advantageously placed were able to observe it without difficulty, almost to the moment of impact. The only possible explanation seems to be that there was a vast amount of light reflected from the snow-covered surface of the ground, and even that explanation is not quite satisfactory. The fact remains that neither Jim nor I was able to observe the surface of the moon as it passed above us. It would have been as easy to look at the sun.

From the moment of this first earthquake, time in the ordinary sense of the word had no meaning for us. We stayed as close to each other and the plane as we could. There was now no distinction between night and day. The sky was a burnished copper color, when it was not being traversed by the brilliantly blazing moon, and, each time the moon

appeared over our rocky horizon, it nearly filled the heavens.

I think we ate from time to time. I know we became extraordinarily thirsty and were continually drinking. I assume that the wind exhausted all the moisture in the air around us, and the air exhausted it from our bodies. I do not even know whether that is a possible explanation, but I give it for what it is worth. I am not quite sure what we would have done for water if there had not been an abundance of snow in our rocky valley. We knew enough not to try to eat it, but we melted it over our little primus stove.

We could tell when the moon was going to appear by the increasing intensity of the earthquakes. They became nearly continuous, and we adjusted ourselves to them as people do to the motion of a ship. We would not have been able to accept them so philosophically if we had not been on top of a mountain where there was nothing to fall on us.

The intervals between the moon's appearances became shorter and shorter.

CHAPTER III—The Moon “Falls”

There came, finally, the thing I had been dreading, and if we had been even a few feet nearer the sea level, we should have perished. The moon filled the sky above us and we felt moisture falling on us.

“Rain!” exclaimed Jim. “No, it can’t be. It’s salt!”

“Tidal wave,” I said, “and it’s reached almost to the tops of the mountains. We’ll get more of it the next time the moon comes around.”

A few hours later there was a new sound added to the roaring and screeching of the wind. We looked at each other.

“It’s come!” I said. “Let’s get inside the cabin. We’ll be as safe there as anywhere.”

We had barely scrambled in and closed the door when simultaneously with the first golden line of the moon over our eastern horizon there appeared a white wall of turbulent water. It seemed higher because we were looking up at it, but I believe now it was not more than six feet. It poured down toward us while we wondered what it would do to us. As it happened, it did nothing of consequence. It swept around the lower part of the plane and came up over the cabin floor. Then it swept on, following the rapidly moving moon toward the west.

“Next time it’s going to get us,” I remarked to Jim.

But there was no next time. We had seen the moon for the last time, though of course we did not then know it.

It was about four hours later that the moon and the earth collided. Fortunately for us, we were lying flat on the rocks in our sleeping bags. It was our only way of keeping warm, and besides, we had thought it better to get what rest we could before the moon appeared again with its accompanying tidal wave. As I said, we had got so used to earthquakes that we did not notice them.

Then it happened...

When I recovered consciousness, at first, I could not think where I was. I looked around in bewilderment and at the same moment realized that a warm rain was drenching me. My bones ached terribly. A few feet away Jim lay as if he were dead.

I crawled out of my sleeping bag and went over and shook him. He opened his eyes and looked at me blankly for a moment. Then he groaned and tried to grin. “So we’re not dead after all?”

“We’ll be drowned if we stay here,” I said wearily. “Let’s try to get inside the cabin. My, it’s hot!”

“Hot?” questioned Jim, trying to rise. “So it is. I think all my bones are broken.”

After half rising and half crawling we made our way to the plane.

There was not a trace of ice or snow. The sky was covered with heavy low-lying clouds from which the rain was pouring, but the burnished copper glow had entirely disappeared. It was a perfectly normal sky, or would have been in the tropics. It was daylight, but there was no sun to be seen.

We had neither of us any clothes except those we wore. We stripped off our dripping outer things and let them lie where they fell. There was nothing else to do with them until the rain stopped. We found that heavy woolen underclothing was not much more comfortable than furs in that temperature. We settled down in the cabin and proceeded to make the best of things, quite content to be alive.

It was evident that the moon and the earth had met, and that the earth had come out of the encounter with less damage than anyone had anticipated. The rise in temperature had been expected. Undoubtedly it was much greater elsewhere than in the Arctic.

Two Survivors

Jim and I compared notes as to our actual experiences at

the moment of the collision. We both remembered the terrible shock and then had known nothing further. We agreed that except for the shaking up we felt no bad effects from the spell of unconsciousness. Scientists have since assumed that in addition to the shock there was the result of the sudden displacement of the fluids in the inner ear which establish equilibrium. There is no reason to suppose that the experience was not universal among those who survived.

Sitting in our monoplane cabin on the top of a Labrador mountain, wiping the perspiration from our faces and waiting for the rain to cease, we had no knowledge of the fearful destruction which almost wiped out all human and animal life. Others have told of tidal waves of boiling water, of the mountains that melted and the great craters which opened in the earth, belching forth molten lava. We knew nothing of this.

The first thing beside the temperature, that told us we were in a different world, was that night did not come. We had let our watches run down, but as the hours passed and daylight remained with us, we began to wonder. Later in the year we would have expected short nights in this latitude, but now there should be six hours of darkness out of the twenty-four.

However, it did not grow dark, and it continued to rain. The idea of what had actually occurred dawned on me even before we got our first glimpse of the sun. That the revolution of a planet on its axis should correspond with the period of its revolution around the sun was quite easily understandable as a theoretical proposition. Its actual effect, the axial revolution of the earth becoming 365 days, could hardly have been predicted.

While the rain continued, Jim and I made no effort to leave our mountain top. I think it was several hours after we had returned to consciousness that we noticed the wind was no longer blowing. We had got so used to its sound that we rather took it for granted, I suppose, and paid no attention to

it.

We were sitting in the cabin, listening to the beating rain, when Jim suddenly exclaimed, “Where’s that wind?”

“What?” I began, and then paused. There was a dead silence outside.

“It’s stopped, apparently,” I said after a moment. “I suppose that means we can see what’s happened without being blown to pieces. Come on.”

I jumped out of the cabin and raced through the pelting rain up the slope of the depression in which we were sheltered. I am not certain what I expected to see when I looked eastward, but it was certainly not that which lay before me.

The ocean had swept over all the land east of the mountains. It had risen at least three thousand feet, and angry waves were tossing fifty feet below the surface of our mountain. They were beaten down by the rain, or the spray would have warned us of the ocean’s nearness before we saw it.

The rain made it difficult to see for any distance, but it was evident that desolation lay before us. Still, we were prepared for that and not discouraged. The steaming water was an evidence that the water’s temperature was higher than that of the air. We had no way of determining what the exact temperature was, but I am sure it did not become high enough in that region to destroy marine life. We stood for some time looking out over the ocean in silence.

“It’s sure dreary looking,” said Jim presently. “I suppose they were all drowned,” sweeping his hand in the direction of the settlements we had left. “I’d got to know them well enough so I liked them all,” he continued rather sadly.

“No use thinking about it,” I answered. “They at least had a gorgeous funeral. It isn’t at all certain yet that we’re much better off.”

“Why? We’re alive.”

I had been looking west, over valleys and hills steaming like the ocean. I pointed in that direction. “We don’t know whether there is anything left except ocean and some land like that. I doubt whether we could subsist very long here.”

“There must be animals of some sort we could hunt.”

“How long will they live, do you suppose? As soon as these clouds clear away the temperature will go up to an enormous figure, with the sun beating down continuously and no night.”

“How hot do you suppose it will get?”

“You can guess about it as well as I can. A hundred and fifty degrees, maybe higher. Certainly hot enough to kill all animal and vegetable life.”

Off to a New Land

The tragedy seemed so overwhelming, as I stood on that sandstone cliff and looked out over the water which had buried Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and, as far as I knew, the whole civilized world, that it hardly seemed worth-while for Jim and me to make an effort to survive.

He looked at me curiously. “Buck up, old boy. Things can’t be any worse than they seem, and they may be better. We can die fighting, anyway.”

“I suppose we’ll have to do that, but it hardly seems worth the effort.” I thought over the situation for a moment. “I guess the first thing to do is to get the plane in condition to take off as soon as it stops raining. We’ll fly toward the pole.”

“Maybe we’ll find some other people who escaped,” he suggested.

“Probably,” I replied as we started back to the plane.

I taxied up the gently sloping top of the mountain to a position where we would have room for the take-off. Then we went over it inch by inch without finding anything wrong. I tuned up the engine and it ran as smoothly as a tabby cat purring. We had food enough for several weeks and fuel to carry us about fifteen hundred miles.

When we had satisfied ourselves that we could leave when we wanted to, Jim and I sat down on the rocks and lighted our pipes. We had become skilful in doing that in a driving rain even when the tobacco was damp. There had been no opportunity to dry clothes, and we did not care to wear wet ones even in that steaming temperature. Sickness was one thing we could not afford to risk. Deprived of his normal senses it does not take man long to revert to savagery. As it happened, after the first feeling of strangeness, going without clothes seemed a perfectly natural and sensible thing to do.

Other inhibitions carried over from the destroyed world were harder to get rid of, as our conscientious lawmakers found out later, when they began to reconstruct a civilization based on reason alone. However, such considerations were far enough from the thoughts of Jim and me as we sat there, looking at the sky where the clouds were beginning to break away.

"The rain's stopping," I said. "We won't be able to stay here much longer." Even as I spoke there was a gleam of sunshine.

"That means we've got to decide exactly what we'd better do," said Jim.

"Yes, and we can't afford to make a mistake. If we had enough fuel we might try for Norway. Extreme northern Europe had a better chance of surviving than the rest of the world. No use talking about that, though."

Jim was silent for a minute. "You'll have to decide what's best yourself. Whatever it is will be all right with me."

It seemed likely that if any concerted effort to escape had been made by persons who had access to airplanes and dirigibles—and I had no doubt there had been such an effort—they would have laid a course for Greenland. Settlements on the coast of that great island had doubtless been destroyed by the tidal waves, but the interior would have been a refuge for anyone able to reach it. As far as I could remember, there was not much known of the interior, except

that it was mountainous and permanently covered with glaciers. Even an ice covering like that could not long survive the temperatures we were now experiencing. It was possible that it would now be entirely habitable and that there we might find refugees from the United States.

The nearest settlement on Greenland to our present location was Frederiksdal, at the southern point of the island. I had not much hope that it had escaped destruction, and I decided to set a course that would bring us to one of the northern settlements. I outlined my plans to Jim and he agreed that there was nothing to be done that seemed more promising.

I remember that I had a feeling almost of panic as the plane arose and sailed over the strange, turbulent steaming ocean. I felt as if we had been carried back to the early days of the world, before continents were formed and life emerged from chaos.

That feeling lasted only for a few minutes. The plane rose higher and the ocean began to look as oceans always had looked. The clouds were scattered and the sun was shining down on us.

CHAPTER IV—Fears and Hopes

I turned in my seat and grinned at Jim and he grinned back. This was the first time that I had felt that life might still be worth living.

We were so near the north magnetic pole that a compass was almost useless. I found myself thinking that I would be guided by the sun as long as daylight lasted, and then suddenly realized that now the sun was stationary in the heavens.

I knew there was not much chance of missing an island fourteen hundred miles long if I flew anywhere in its general direction. I set a course of north-north-east with the idea of striking land somewhere about the settlement of Upernavik. I decided that it would be less likely to have been affected by the catastrophe than Godhavn, the capital of North Greenland. Godhavn was the largest town, but it was located on a small island off the coast, and I thought it might have been swept away by tidal waves. We found out later that every settlement on the coast had disappeared, except Upernavik.

It must be remembered that the Greenland of those days was very different from the present flourishing center of the world's government and civilization. Eighty-six percent of its 826,000 square miles was covered by an ice-cap which in some places was two thousand feet thick. There were frowning cliffs coming down to the ocean's edge and the center of the island was a high plateau. That was really all most people knew about it.

It was entirely by accident that I knew a little more. I had once a Danish mechanician working for me who had travelled from Iceland to Greenland before he finally landed in New York looking for a job. There is a mineral called *cryolite* which is used in making a certain kind of porcelain and is found only in Greenland. A Pennsylvania concern held

the mining concession and shipped the ore to Philadelphia. Jens Jensen came down on one of their steamers and hired out as a mechanician with the idea of getting a plane to fly back.

It seems he had discovered deposits of copper. He tried to interest me in developing them and he told me about Greenland. At first I did not believe him when he told of great stretches of country covered with shrubs and flowering plants and dwarf trees. When he said that there were four hundred varieties of plants and over a hundred types of birds I was so openly skeptical that he gazed at me reproachfully and then left the room. In a few minutes he came back with a volume of an encyclopaedia open at the article on Greenland.

So Jensen was responsible for my knowing more about Greenland than most people did. I knew there were about five hundred white people on the island, as well as fifteen thousand natives. With radio warning of what was about to happen, there was no reason why most of them should not have retreated to the central plateau and have escaped destruction.

As we flew, hour after hour, without sight of land, I began to get worried. The gasoline supply was getting low and there was nothing in sight but the tumbling ocean. It finally dawned on me that I must have set a course far south of the one I intended, unless Greenland had disappeared beneath the waves.

I wrote a note and passed it to Jim, telling him that I had probably made a mistake in direction and that I intended to turn at right angles to our present course and fly directly north. He nodded his head in approval after he had read the note, and I swept around in a wide curve for a final desperate effort to reach land.

I am not sure what the result would have been if we had not got help. I was staring steadily ahead when I felt a touch on my shoulder. I glanced back and saw Jim pointing to an object in the sky a few miles away, but approaching rapidly.

For a moment I thought it was a bird, and then I saw it was a gigantic Fokker monoplane. It circled above us and I saw a man leaning out of the cabin window, making motions to us.

Jim handed me a piece of paper on which he had written, "I think he wants us to follow them."

I silently nodded my head and started in their direction. As soon as the observer noticed this he drew his head back into the cabin and the last stage of our journey began.

Following the big Fokker was a simple matter, as long as our gas held out. When an hour passed and then a second hour without sight of land, I began to get nervous. If we dropped into the sea there was not much chance of our being rescued.

When a blue haze appeared on the horizon and rapidly grew into a land of great frowning mountains, I breathed a sigh of relief. Greenland rose out of the ocean, with precipitous cliffs hundreds of feet high against which we could see immense breakers dashing themselves into spray.

We Start A Settlement

We continued to follow the Fokker, rising over range after range of mountains. Some of the peaks must have been about eleven thousand feet above the former sea level and stood out now bare and bleak with no covering mantle of trees and vegetation. From the earliest history of the world, they had been covered by the ice cap, which had now melted. There were great rivers and waterfalls in the valleys, and in sheltered spots we could see masses of green which might be vegetation, though we were too high in the air to distinguish details.

Suddenly Jim touched me on the arm and pointed ahead to a spot he had been watching through field glasses. At first I could not see what had attracted his attention in the wide valley down which a river flowed. Then a moment later I saw houses.

The Fokker began to descend. We were passing over a

fairly large settlement and making for what was certainly a landing field. There were hangars and dozens of planes in the open. Men began running toward us as presently we taxied down the field.

They paid no attention to the big Fokker, which made a good landing a hundred yards away, but raced toward us. Almost before we had stopped I threw open the cabin door and Jim and I climbed out. We had felt for some time the possibility that we were the only men left alive in the world. Now the mere sight of other men had become a wildly exciting adventure.

There was something familiar about the man nearest to us when we landed. I looked at him again.

"Billy Matthews!" I shouted. "How did you get here?"

I had gone to college with Billy and we had been in the same company in France. He had been connected with the government air mail service during the past few years.

He threw his arm around my shoulders. "I was afraid you'd gone like most of the boys, young fella." He stood off and looked me over. "You look pretty fit," he said.

"Oh, I'm all right," I said impatiently. "I want to know what happened? I've been stuck up in Labrador and don't know anything. This is Jimmy Nelson, by the way. He was wireless operator where I was stationed."

The two men shook hands. Meanwhile a crowd had gathered around us.

"There's no time to talk about that now. You come with me and get a little sleep, and then we'll have to put you to work."

I laughed. "All right. What kind of work?"

"Finding people who escaped the catastrophe and are now starving to death. No, not here, of course. We have plenty of supplies and are getting more all the time. This settlement is practically part of Upernavik. The town proper was too near the coast to be quite safe. All of us who could get away from

the United States made for this point. The scientists agreed that there would be more chance of escaping here than any place else we could reach."

"How many got away?"

He shook his head. "No way of telling. People started in everything that could fly and came down all over. Most of them are done for. Those who succeeded in landing in out-of-the-way places are the ones we are trying to rescue now."

"How many reached here?"

"About three thousand."

"Everybody else in the United States dead?"

"Most of them, I'm afraid, though we don't know definitely yet. There are six hundred planes here, and we're using them to locate any people still living. That is, we're using about half of them for that. The others we have to use in getting fuel and supplies."

"Where are you getting them from?"

"Iceland and Spitsbergen. Neither island was seriously hurt. Of course there was no danger of our starving, even if we hadn't been able to get anything from outside. Greenland had a population of about twenty thousand people. They could easily take care of us."

"What's happened to Europe? I suppose it wasn't hurt as badly as the United States?"

Billy shook his head gravely. "We're not absolutely certain yet, of course, but we think it's all gone except northern Norway, Sweden and northern Russia."

By this time we had reached a house that had apparently not been damaged by the earthquakes. It was curious to see furniture again and a bed with mattresses and sheets. I wanted to hear more, but Billy insisted that we must get some sleep before we did anything else. I was inclined to rebel, but it did no good.

A New Danger

“There’s something I didn’t intend to tell you until tomorrow. We have a few astronomers and scientists here, and they brought some of their instruments. The seismographs have been acting funny for the past forty-eight hours.”

“Well, what about it? What’s another earthquake after all we’ve been through?” I asked flippantly.

Billy remained grave. “It’s something more than that, but what we don’t know. Two days ago the seismographs began to record a steady vibration which has been increasing in intensity hour by hour. We’re probably all right for the next twelve hours. After that—” he paused significantly. “Anyhow, I want you fellows to get three hours’ sleep. You’ll need to be in good shape. I’ll call you if things get worse.”

I did not realize how tired I was until I threw myself on the bed. I had a vivid dream of hunting lions in Africa and wounding one. The lion was not killed and springing at me, caught my shoulder in his jaws. He was shaking me to and fro when I awoke and found Billy standing over me.

“I thought I’d never get you awake. Get up and come to the flying field.”

I was suddenly conscious of a trembling beneath me, as if I were on the deck of a boat near the engine. Jim was already up and we both looked questioningly at Billy’s grave face.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Possibly a new cataclysm that will wipe all surviving human beings from the face of the earth. You know about as much as any of us.”

By this time I was wide awake. “What are we to do when we get to the flying field?”

“There is a dispute among the fliers as to whether it would be better to take to the air in the machines with as many passengers as they can carry, or wait developments here with the planes sheltered as much as possible. They want your advice.”

A few minutes later we were making our way to the center of a gesticulating crowd of men. The majority seemed to think that the best thing to do was to take to the air and trust to luck that here would be no wind storms, as there had been during the previous calamity. I had done considerable writing on aeronautics and had a certain reputation as an expert. Both parties had agreed that my decision as to the best course of action would be accepted by all concerned.

I stood there bracing my feet firmly as the trembling of the earth increased and the rumbling became louder. I looked at the sky which had become overcast with fast hurrying clouds. If any sky ever indicated wind, that one did. I made my decision.

"Get the planes to sheltered valleys immediately. We won't be safe on land, but we'll be safer than we would be in the air, with the wind that's coming. Quick! There's no time to waste."

The crowd scattered, some of them joyously and more with sullen resentment expressed in their gloomy faces.

Jim and I hurried over to our place. The wind was rapidly rising as I started the motor, but it was a relief to get in the air away from the swaying earth.

We flew over the town and followed a number of other planes to make a rather hazardous landing in a narrow transverse valley which was almost like a ravine. The precipitous sides rose perpendicularly and it would be a bad place to be in a cloud-burst, but it afforded almost perfect shelter from wind. There was a chance that the rocky walls might precipitate themselves on us if the earth tremblings became much more violent.

The other aviators gathered around and we consulted as to the next thing to do. The planes were as safe as they could be anywhere, but none of us liked the idea of staying in the valley ourselves.

Finally after considerable discussion, one of the men who had his wife, and a ten-year-old youngster with him

announced, “You fellows can do what you want to, but it looks to me as if hell was going to break loose any minute now. If I get killed, it’s going to be on top of this mountain instead of underneath it.”

“There’s nothing more we can do here now,” I answered. “I guess we’d better all try to reach the top before things get any worse.”

It was a hard climb, especially for the women, most of whom were pretty badly frightened. Both men and women were a selected lot, but all had been through so much recently that nerves had gone back on them. Besides, it was a very terrifying situation.

A New World Arises

We had got used to the constant light and heat of the sun. It was now covered by heavy clouds which were scurrying across the sky at hurricane speed. They had become so heavy and dark that we could hardly see one another a few feet apart. All heat from the sun seemed to have been shut off and the temperature had fallen so rapidly that we were suffering from the cold.

The roaring of the wind was now so loud that we could not hear each other’s voices, unless we shouted. The trembling and swaying of the earth was becoming more pronounced every minute, and some of the people actually became seasick.

Jim and I lay flat on our faces on the highest point we could reach. The swaying of the earth had made even my stomach feel a little uneasy. My scientific ardor was momentarily dampened by my physical discomfort. Therefore Jim got the first glimpse of what was happening.

“Good Lord, look!” he suddenly exclaimed in an awed voice.

I raised my head and then rubbed my eyes. The whole central Greenland plateau seemed to be rapidly sinking, and all around the horizon great mountain ranges were lifting

themselves toward the sky. We were lying on a rock, two infinitely small insects, watching a new continent being born.

As far as scientists have since been able to determine, the central Greenland plateau was not lowered, but the effect was caused by the entire surrounding region being forced out of the ocean high into the air. Then we did not know what was happening. It was at least a week later before the first trip in a plane showed us that the entire ocean floor, extending from Labrador to Norway and northward to the pole, had been elevated to an average height of ten thousand feet above sea level. The continent thus formed is the seat of present day civilization.

The swaying of the earth gradually ceased and all went back to the town. Again we took hope that the worst was over and we were going to survive. This time, our faith seems to have been justified. The final upheaval was a successful effort of the mass of the earth to attain a position of equilibrium. Five years have passed, and there have been no evidences of further convulsions.

We have organized our life on the assumption that terrestrial conditions are now reasonably stable. Our country is a great island extending from the region of the former Ural mountains to the former Hudson Bay. It includes northern Russia, Finland, northern Norway and Sweden, Iceland and Greenland and part of Canada. It extends northward to the pole and it is bounded on all sides by the great mountain ranges which rose from the sea.

Our civilization is largely English speaking, and the seat of government is Upernavik in Greenland. Our population is small, considering the geographical extent of the country, and we are encouraging in every way the production of large families.

The catastrophe which destroyed our old world was so overwhelming that it is impossible to grieve over the smaller things that we have lost. We are all working cheerfully to build a better world.

The world we are living in is a very interesting one. Even the most adventurous among us have learned little about it as yet. The entire Pacific region has never been visited since the moon crashed. Jim and I often speculate about the conditions on the other side of the earth. We are having a huge metallic dirigible constructed, and when it is completed we intend to go on an exploring expedition. We expect to be the first to look upon the destroyed world.

Of course, no one can tell what dangers we may encounter, or even whether we will survive. It is for that reason I have related our experiences at the time of the great catastrophe, so they may be preserved in case neither Jim nor I return.

The End.

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